



Telling the Poder Popular story: In their own words

By Gloria Sayavedra, California Institute for Rural Studies, senior research analyst

Everyone associated with Poder Popular has worked very hard, and many changes have taken place since the program began three years ago. California Institute for Rural Studies (CIRS) and Harder+Company evaluators, have visited the seven Promotores Comunitarios de Salud Strategy sites twice a year to "tell the story." Evaluators recognized the importance of having Poder Popular promotores de comunitarios and committee (comité) members contribute their stories in their own words, to show the difference they have made in their communities.

Evaluators invited participants to compete in a contest, Telling a Story. The contest didn't require a written story. Participants could use any method to demonstrate SI SE PUEDE, make the change! The evaluators urged contestants to produce something they can use in the future to attract more people to their projects; to show public authorities what they are doing together; or to obtain support from other agencies. They were encouraged to build a testimony of the victories and struggles in their communities. Contest rules mandated that the story represent the entire comité and the prize would be used as seed money for community projects to benefit all.

Evaluators received 11 entries, eight of them from the following comités: Sonoma, Planada-Merced, Vista-San Diego, San Anthony-Coachella, Pala-San Diego, Firebaugh, San Joaquin and Mendota (Fresno). Additionally, Pala and Los Duros-Coachella promotoras entered three individual submissions. Evaluators noted that all of the submissions were excellent and stated it was very difficult to narrow it down to only three finalists. The entries were judged by a panel consisting of CIRS, Harder+Company and Rural Community Assistance Corporation staff. The winners were selected based on overall quality and the extent to

which the submission reflected the spirit of Poder Popular.

The three contest winners are:

- 1)The Comité de Vista in San Diego, for its four-part skit titled, "HIV-AIDS, City Lights, Farmworker Rights Violation and Family Fire Preparedness"
- 2)The Comité de St. Anthony in Coachella, for its skit about renters' rights called, "Parqueadero"
- 3)The Comité de Mendota in West Fresno for its audiovisual presentation, "Cambiando el hoy y mejorando el futuro" (Changing today and improving the future)

Los Duros Comité in Coachella received an honorable mention for the letter, "Cuando el sueño se vuelve pesadilla" (When the dream turns into a nightmare) written by Elisa Guevara

Each of the three winning comités will receive \$1,000 to strengthen its efforts to implement Poder Popular and create healthier communities.

"The contest was a wonderful opportunity to showcase creativity and to present a clear and concise message in a very original way. There is a lot of hidden talent in our communities and it shows," said Alvaro Toledo,



Comite de Mendota's contest presentation included vivid images of their community activities.

RCAC community and program specialist and contest judge.

Evaluators hope the material they created for the contest will be useful for the comités to continue to promote Poder Popular in the communities, conduct fundraising, attract new comité members and recruit new promotores.

On behalf of the evaluation team, and as this article's author, I want to say that, in this participative evaluation, we have learned more from listening than from speaking. My heartfelt thanks go to all for their efforts. I know that change and empowerment will continue, as the promotoras told us, "This is only the beginning." 🌱

Agricultural worker commission persists

By Shoshana Zatz, RCAC rural development specialist

Recognizing the need for a new, more creative approach to the welfare of agricultural workers in the face of declining farm profits, the California Legislature created the Agricultural Worker Health and Housing Commission in 2006. Since then, this unique and innovative group has been working together to improve living conditions for California's agricultural workers.

Of particular significance, the commission is comprised equally of agricultural worker advocates and farm employers. These California

growers and farm worker advocates put aside their differences to make great strides toward removing barriers and reaching mutual understanding. The

legislative act that created the commission grew from a series of Food System Symposia convened by Rural
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Agricultural worker commission nears completion

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Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC). The commission's charge has been to make policy recommendations that will improve the quality of life for agricultural workers while maintaining the economic viability of California agriculture.

“Unfortunately, when the Legislature created the commission, it did not allocate funding for the commission’s work.”

California agriculture has long been characterized by frequent, often bitter, labor conflict. While a great deal of progress has been made in the past 50 years to secure decent working and living conditions for agricultural workers, it is clear that some workers still face conditions that do not meet standards of common decency. At the same time, California farm operations are facing unprecedented competition from foreign competitors whose labor and environmental standards are less stringent than California's.

To date, the commission has conducted:

- A multi-sector analysis of market flows within the California food system
- Background research on comparable models of sector-based worker health plans
- Background research on innovative models of migrant and seasonal worker housing

The commission also prepared options for fiscal policies that generate food system funding support for agricultural workers. The commission compiled and compared alternative policy models for providing increased primary care access for California agricultural workers and seasonal and migrant worker housing. Additionally, the commission assessed and summarized key

stakeholder views on worker health and housing plan options.

While the growers and advocates on the commission do not agree on all issues related to immigration, labor and health care reform, their work together has brought them to a place of mutual respect for each other's positions. The growers serving on the commission currently provide housing and health care support to their workers, not necessarily because they think it's the "right" thing to do, but because they recognize that it is in their own self-interest to attract and retain loyal and skilled workers. The advocates have been surprised by the level of willingness on the part of the grower community to reach agreement when they feel their business issues are understood and acknowledged.

Over the last two years, the commission has examined many issues related to agricultural worker welfare from a new perspective, going beyond agriculture to include the workings of the entire food system. As a result, commission recommendations will include a package of housing improvements to benefit seasonal and migrant farm workers, providing for flexibility in using grower land and cooperation between growers and nonprofit organizations in building and operating farm worker housing. Addressing health issues, the commission is working on health reforms to ensure that agricultural workers are included by using grower's current arrangements through Multiple Employer Welfare Agreements, self-insurance and cooperation with farm worker clinics.

Unfortunately, when the Legislature created the commission, it did not allocate funding for the commission's work. Fortunately, RCAC and The California Endowment funded the commission, enabling it to function. However, this funding ended in February. The commission still has significant work remaining to meet its stated goals. Commission members anticipate that they can complete their

work and see tangible results given another 10 months.

Over the next 10 months, the commission's work entails the following activities:

- Draft and refine a detailed report to the legislature summarizing commission recommendations in both the health and housing areas, and drawing attention to the unique composition of the commission's membership.
- Publish and disseminate the report to a wide audience of stakeholders.
- Hold press conferences to generate media coverage and public interest.
- Conduct an advocacy effort within and outside the legislature to ensure that the recommendations are implemented, rather than remaining just "words on a page".

RCAC is working with commission members to secure the funding necessary to complete their work and leave a legacy of cooperation and progress toward better living conditions for California's agricultural workers. 🌱

Did you know?

According to a 2008 U.S. Department of Agriculture study, between 10 and 30 percent of California farm workers are estimated to be indigenous.

In a Jan. 27 article entitled "Indigenous spur change in fed's farm worker survey," posted on *weather.com*, Manuel Valdes wrote, "Latin American indigenous are sometimes grouped with Latinos. Their last names and countries of origin lead people to think they're Latino, but they have a distinct history and background. Under Department of Labor and U.S. Census Bureau data, indigenous Latin Americans are grouped with Native Americans and Alaska Natives, making data about them hard to extract." Additionally, many of them speak their own various dialects and only limited Spanish, making them harder to serve.